

Erin M. Enos. Generation Speaking: A Perspective of Genealogy Captured Through the Lens of the Millennial Generation. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree. April 2016. 77 pages. Advisor: Denise Anthony

Within the last 20 to 30 years, researchers have conducted studies of the genealogy community. Unfortunately, these studies have not recognized the millennial generation, as an active group of the genealogical community. Millennials have overtaken the Baby Boomer generation as the largest age group in America. Regarding the generation's population size, why haven't millennials been widely studied in the genealogy community? Few studies about millennials and genealogy leave numerous questions left to be answered: How much is known about the millennial generation in genealogy studies? What thoughts do millennials have in regards to genealogy? What factors drive their feelings? The researcher conducted a genealogy-based survey with millennials at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in hopes of uncovering answers about this generation. The findings of this study will help institutions to better understand millennials as recognized members within the genealogical community.

Headings:

Genealogists

Genealogy

Family history (genealogy)

Millennials

College people

Generation Y

GENERATION SPEAKING:
A PERSPECTIVE OF GENEALOGY CAPTURED THROUGH THE LENS OF THE
MILLENNIAL GENERATION

by
Erin M. Enos

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April 2016

Approved by

Denise Anthony

Table of Contents

GENEALOGY TODAY	3
GENEALOGY IS GROWING AS A HOBBY	3
WHAT PEOPLE ARE DOING TO EXPRESS THEIR INTEREST IN GENEALOGY	4
GENEALOGY IS HIGHLY ACCESSIBLE THANKS TO INTERNET AND MEDIA	4
THE PROBLEM: MILLENNIALS UNDERSTUDIED IN GENEALOGY COMMUNITY	6
PAPER OVERVIEW	7
ABOUT THE STUDY	9
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	9
ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS	10
DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY EXPLANATIONS	10
WHAT IS GENEALOGY AND WHAT IS A GENEALOGIST?	10
WHAT IS FAMILY HISTORY?	11
WHAT IS A MILLENNIAL?	12
WHAT IS MEANT BY “INTEREST”?	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	14
MOTIVATION STUDIES	14
GENEALOGY MOTIVATIONS THROUGHOUT TIME	14
KINGS, PEDIGREES, AND RIGHTS TO THE THRONE.....	14
FEELINGS OF GENEALOGY AMONG AMERICAN COLONISTS DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.	15
A TIME FOR REFLECTION: 1880s-1890s	16
HOME LIFE PRIOR TO THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION	17
THE INFLUENCE OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION.....	17
IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY	18
ROOTSMANIA IN 1976	19
STUDIES THAT HAVE INVESTIGATED MOTIVATIONS FOR DOING GENEALOGY	20
STUDIES ON TRIGGERS AND WHAT GETS PEOPLE GOING ON DOING GENEALOGY	22
STUDIES THAT HAVE DISCUSSED MOTIVATIONS FOR NOT DOING GENEALOGY	24
STUDIES AND RESEARCH ON MILLENNIAL GENERATION	26
MILLENNIAL VIEWS ON FAMILY	27

MILLENNIALS RECEIVE A BAD REPUTATION THAT THEY'RE NOT INTERESTED IN GENEALOGY	28
MILLENNIALS ACTIVE IN GENEALOGY TODAY	31
METHODOLOGY	35
RESEARCH SURVEY	35
RESULTS	39
AGE OF RESPONDENTS	39
GENDER	40
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU DONE OR ARE CURRENTLY DOING TO GET TO KNOW YOUR FAMILY'S HISTORY?	41
ARE THESE ACTIVITIES YOU ENJOY(ED)?	42
PLEASE RATE YOUR CURRENT OVERALL INTEREST TOWARDS GENEALOGY	43
DO YOU BELIEVE THAT FAMILY IS A STRONG PERSONAL VALUE?	44
WHAT FIRST TRIGGERED YOUR INTEREST IN GENEALOGY?	44
WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO CONDUCT GENEALOGY OR WANT TO ENGAGE IN IT?	45
HOW LONG HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN GENEALOGY FAMILY HISTORY?	46
HAS SOMEONE OR SOMETHING EVER LEFT YOU FEELING DISCOURAGED FROM RESEARCHING YOUR FAMILY BECAUSE OF YOUR YOUTH?	47
WHY AREN'T YOU INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN ANY ACTIVITIES?	47
IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WOULD CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT GENEALOGY?	49
DO YOU HAVE AN INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVITIES SUCH AS THOSE LISTED IN THE PREVIOUS QUESTION?	50
REASONS FOR CURRENT LACK OF PARTICIPATION?	51
DISCUSSION	52
MOST MILLENNIALS ARE ACTIVE IN THE GENEALOGY COMMUNITY	52
TRIGGERS LINKED TO EMOTIONS AND LIFE CHANGES	53
COMMON THEMES FOUND IN MOTIVATIONS AMONG MILLENNIALS	55
TIME AND CULTURE MAY PLAY ROLE	57
MILLENNIALS AND FAMILY	59
BARRIERS AND NON-MOTIVATIONS EXIST FOR MILLENNIALS	60
CONCLUSION	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66
APPENDIX	70
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS	70
APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS WORKFLOW CHART	75

INTRODUCTION

GENEALOGY TODAY

Today, genealogy is one of America's most popular hobbies in which individuals attempt to piece together their family's history based on names, dates, and events. By conducting research, genealogy not only allows individuals to get to know their family members on a more personal level, but also allows them to know more about themselves in the process.

GENEALOGY IS GROWING AS A HOBBY

The popularity of genealogy in America is growing and those in the genealogy community are taking notice. Gary Schroder, the president of the Quebec Family History Society, commented on the growth saying that genealogy is indeed the fastest-growing hobby in North America, in reference to Canada and the United States.¹ Likewise, the well-known family history website, Ancestry.com, also took notice of the popularity growth reporting that family research conducted in the U.S. helped to spike sales and profits for its organization in 2010.² The popularity is too great to ignore.

¹ Kathryn Greenway, "Curious About Your Roots?; Genealogy Convention Focuses on Discovering Family History," *Montreal Gazette* (May 13, 2015), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1680909331?accountid=14244>

² Suzanne McGee, "Ancestry.com Puts Down Roots," *Barons* (New York, New York), August 9, 2010, <http://www.barrons.com/articles/SB50001424052970203667404575413752973415626>

WHAT PEOPLE ARE DOING TO EXPRESS THEIR INTEREST IN GENEALOGY

Many participating in genealogy continue to express their interest in different ways, ranging from simple acts of talking to family members, constructing family trees, joining genealogy clubs or attending genealogical workshops to more complex activities such as traveling to ancestral hometown or countries, writing family histories, or researching family records.³ Americans today are expressing interest in their families in different ways, but no matter how different, people are accomplishing the same goal: discovering the history of their family's past.

GENEALOGY IS HIGHLY ACCESSIBLE THANKS TO INTERNET AND MEDIA

Genealogy popularity has also increased due to the influence of media, especially the Internet. Searching for family information has never been easier as family records these days are readily made available online with a simple click of a mouse or the use of a search engine. Jennie Geisler Hutchinson agrees, saying that in 2016, genealogy has grown in recent years due to many public records that have become readily accessible online, both for free or for a fee.⁴ Similarly, Curt Witcher, the former 2002 president of the National Genealogical Society, noticed this increase in accessibility stating that,

³ Maritz Marketing Research Inc., "Sixty Percent of Americans Intrigued By Their Family Roots," Public Relations Newswire. (Last modified May 16, 2000).
<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/sixty-percent-of-americans-intrigued-by-their-family-roots-73184067.html>

⁴ Jennie Geisler Hutchinson, "Internet Helps, but Genealogy Still a Worthy Challenge," *TCA Regional News* (blog). Jan 31, 2016.
<http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1761319349?accountid=1424>

*The Internet has really fueled this activity because it's made it easy to transfer data, collaborate and do research without traveling around. It's been phenomenal.*⁵

As grand and accessible as online genealogy is now, genealogist D. Joshua Taylor predicts that the hobby's presence will grow even more with additional online websites that will feature more digital scrapbooks and family histories, additional blogs with live recordings, videos and additional links to more family information.⁶ The popular genealogy website Ancestry.com⁷, based in Provo, Utah is one of the most widely used and recognized genealogy research sites in the United States, offering more than 7 billion family records available for research.⁸ Another site called Cyndi's List is also available to the public as not only a site for family researchers, but also a genealogy website with hundreds of genealogy related links on numerous genealogy-related topics including DNA, genetics, family health, reunions, How-to guides, names, and much more.⁹ With sites like these, the Internet is and continues to be a place where genealogy enthusiasts go to foster their interest in the hobby.

Genealogy TV shows have also become popular with American audiences, showing Americans that genealogy can be educational as well as entertaining.¹⁰ For

⁵ Bob Tedeschi, "Genealogists Lucrative Online Niche." *The New York Times* (New York, New York), September 23, 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/23/technology/23ECOM.html?pagewanted=all>

⁶ Laurie Snow Turner, "Genealogy Goes Prime Time and it's Not Just for the Retired Anymore," *Deseret News* (blog), August 15, 2011, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705389133/Genealogy-goes-prime-time-and-its-not-just-for-the-retired-anymore.html?pg=all>

⁷ *Ancestry.com*. Last modified 2016, www.ancestry.com

⁸ Dizik, Alina. "Not Your Grandmother's Genealogy Hobby; With Wikis and Other Forms of Group Research, Family Historians Are Making Surprising Connections." *The Wall Street Journal* (New York, New York), December 1, 2011. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204012004577070160995868288>.

⁹ *Cyndi's List*. Last modified 2016, www.cyndislist

¹⁰ Larrisa Faw, "Millennials Seek Out Criminal Branches on Their Family Tree." *Forbes* (blog). October 4, 2013. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/larissafaw/2013/10/04/millennials-look-out-criminal-branches-on-their-family-tree/#743ed9a9e10b>; Turner, "Genealogy goes prime time..."

example, there is The Learning Channel's (TLC) American version of "Who Do You Think You Are?", the TV show in which viewers follow American celebrities including Sarah Jessica Parker, Lionel Richie, and Tim McGraw as they trace their family's history with the help of historians and genealogists, all the while finding out unknown facts about themselves.¹¹ Additionally, other shows like the PBS series "Genealogy Roadshow" features three genealogists who help Americans research family heirlooms in hopes of uncovering valuable information about their past.¹²

THE PROBLEM: MILLENNIALS UNDERSTUDIED IN GENEALOGY COMMUNITY

Genealogy popularity in America is on the rise with vast amounts of exposure through Internet and media. However, research about millennials and their interest in genealogy has been absent or misrepresented in such studies. Genealogical studies have focused more attention on the Baby Boomer generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) rather than on millennials (those defined in this study to be born between 1978 and 1995). It is a fact that millennials currently make up the biggest generation in America, now totaling about 78 million members.¹³ Given the size of their population in the U.S., why then, have millennials not been widely studied by researchers? Due to few studies in academia about millennials and genealogy together, there are numerous questions yet to be answered: How much is known about the millennial generation? What thoughts (good

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705389133/Genealogy-goes-prime-time-and-its-not-just-for-the-retired-anymore.html?pg=all>

¹¹ *Who Do You Think You Are?*, TV program. TLC, www.tlc.com/tv-shows/who-do-you-think-you-are/about-the-show/about-the-show/

¹² *Genealogy Roadshow*, TV program. PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/genealogy-roadshow/home/>

¹³ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011, 2

or bad) do millennials have in regards to genealogy? What factors (i.e. social, economic, psychological, or physical) drive these thoughts? If information organizations such as genealogical societies, historical organizations, museums, and libraries wish to connect with and engage young adults into participating in genealogical programs at their institutions, they and the general public will need to better understand genealogy from the millennial perspective.

PAPER OVERVIEW

This paper investigates how involved the millennial generation is in conducting genealogical research. This subject seems to have been neglected, overlooked, or forgotten in the genealogical studies that have been done so far in academia. The main purpose of this paper will be to find out how millennials feel about genealogy, whether they think it is interesting, the motives behind their thoughts (positive or negative), and the barriers they may currently face as young citizens.

The beginning of this paper will provide a background overview of the study, a discussion of the study's assumptions and limitations, and an overview of the definitions of terminology that will be important to the discussion of this paper.

Part two will consist of the Literature Review. The first half of the review will explore studies on genealogy motivations or the reasons for keeping up with family research. First, it will examine how time and culture throughout history helped to influence the way past societies looked back onto their family roots. Secondly, it will explore past studies of genealogical motivations. Thirdly, it will examine past studies of genealogical triggers or events that influenced people to become interested in the hobby. Finally, it will look at the studies that explored the reasons for not participating in

genealogy. The second half of the Literature Review will investigate studies on the millennial generation, discussing who the millennials are, what negative issues they face in regards to genealogy research, and how involved they are in the genealogy community today.

Part three will discuss a qualitative online survey conducted by the researcher aimed at surveying the millennial student body at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). The methods of carrying out the survey will be thoroughly explained as will the analysis of survey results.

Part four will conclude with closing remarks about the significance of the survey and how the results can benefit various genealogy institutions in connecting and reaching out to millennials to include them as members of the genealogy community.

ABOUT THE STUDY

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Before diving into this study about millennials and genealogy interest, I would like to take a moment to first discuss the context behind the study. The idea for the study did not start until two or three years ago when I first talked to a great aunt who told me stories about my grandmother, how my grandmother grew up as a tomboy, how she played every sport she could get her hands on, and how she met my grandfather while playing a game of basketball. These stories my great aunt told intrigued me so much that I started writing blog posts about them. I wondered if any of my cousins, all of whom are in their 20's and 30's, had heard these stories about our grandparents or if any of them bothered to ask questions of the family elders.

As years passed, it became apparent that I was officially acting as the young family historian. I found that out of all my cousins, only I took the initiative in asking the family elders questions about their past, recording their voices on a digital tape recorder, documenting their stories based on casual conversations, and dreaming of publishing a book of family stories later in life. As I was the sole millennial in the family who seemed to take pride in the hobby, I wondered why none of my six cousins and brother showed interest in researching the family as much as I did. After all, my cousins and I all came from the same family, but why was it that we did not share a common sense of curiosity

about our family? Since then, this curiosity has inspired and motivated me to find out what specific factors influence how millennials view genealogy.

ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Although the researcher was unsuccessful in finding academic studies that focused on millennials within genealogy studies, she did find small signs of evidence within non-academic sources (i.e. magazine articles, blog posts, You Tube videos, and various websites) that provided information that millennials were active in the hobby. No academic studies seemed to have studied millennials in genealogy before, but non-academic sources seemed to strongly suggest otherwise. The researcher wanted to confirm this observation in an academic study. She, therefore, made the intellectual assumption that survey results would show proof that millennials would have an interest in genealogical practices.

The only limitation within this study was time. Ideally, the researcher wanted to expand the sample group to cover millennials from individual towns and beyond the boundaries of her college campus. Due to limited time that was given to conduct the study (approximately 9 months), however, the researcher realized that her best option was to focus only on the UNC population.

DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY EXPLANATIONS

WHAT IS GENEALOGY AND WHAT IS A GENEALOGIST?

The following vocabulary terms will be addressed for the sake of clarity for this study: Genealogy, genealogists, family history, millennial, and interest.

The terms “genealogy” and “family history” tend to be used interchangeably since both almost seem to talk about the same concepts of family and history. In reality, the two terms have slightly different meanings. It is important to distinguish the two somewhat-similar terms. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the term “genealogy” refers to the science of studying family origins and history. The term comes from two Greek words, one being *genea* which means “race or “family” while the second, *logia*, means “theory” or “science.” Therefore, genealogy literally means family theory or the study of family history.¹⁴ Ronald D. Lambert adds that genealogy also means collecting and making pedigree charts or family trees that show patterns of ancestry and descent.¹⁵ In simpler words, genealogy is simply the pursuit of names, births, deaths, marriages, and births in one’s family, the cut and dry part of the research that is made up of facts about people. The people who are known as genealogists are the researchers who pursue this basic family information and organize the information into what is known as pedigree charts or family trees.¹⁶

WHAT IS FAMILY HISTORY?

The term “family history” has a slightly different meaning from “genealogy” and can be seen as a more entertaining look at family research. According to Lambert, the term “family history” means adding richness to pedigree charts, coloring genealogy research with biographical, historical or other contextual information. Family history can

¹⁴ Leslie Gilbert Pine, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Genealogy.” modified December 14, 2015. <http://www.britannica.com/topic/genealogy>

¹⁵ Ronald D. Lambert, “The Family Historian and Temporal Orientations Towards the Ancestral Past,” *Time and Society* 5, no. 2 (1996): 116.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

be seen as the meat of genealogical research and is what makes ancestors come to life, other than being plainly represented as a flat name and date on a page.¹⁷

WHAT IS A MILLENNIAL?

During the initial research of millennials for this study, I encountered numerous sources where authors and researchers defined millennials differently in reference to years of birth. For example, while a source from findmypast.com defined millennials as being born between 1976 and 2001¹⁸, another source believed that millennials were born between 1980 and 2000.¹⁹ Amy Sell also defined millennials as having been born between 1976 and 2001.²⁰ Needless to say, definitions were quite diverse and confusing. For clarity, the researcher took the most popular years defined in various sources and created her own definition. Going forward, millennials in this study will be defined as individuals born as early as 1978 and as late as 1995. The researcher's definition should not be taken as the true definition of millennials and should, instead, be viewed as a basic definition of the generation.

WHAT IS MEANT BY "INTEREST"?

The term "interest" also requires explanation. For this study, the researcher will decide that a person defined as "interested" in genealogy will refer to a person who is curious about their family's past, finds pleasure in learning about the family's past,

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ D. Joshua Taylor, "Gen Y: The Top Lessons Learned from Genealogy," *The Huffington Post* (blog), May 20, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/d-joshua-taylor/the-top-lessons-learned-from-genealogy_b_3293806.html

¹⁹ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 2.

²⁰ Amy Sell, "Youth in Genealogy: Generation Y Redefines Family History Research (blog). January 25, 2013, <https://blog.findmypast.com/youth-in-genealogy-generation-y-redefines-family-history-research-14060449013.html>

warms up to the idea of doing research someday, or currently practices genealogy research. Showing interest could mean anything from simply talking and asking family members questions about their lives to something more complex such as designing a family website. The researcher associates the concept of “interest” with having passion, curiosity, and the will to learn something about the family and themselves. Another way that the researcher views interest is if the person looks at genealogy in a positive way in which something good can be gained from the experience.

On the other hand, the researcher defines someone as having “no interest” based on the following characteristics: one has little to no interest in learning about the family’s past, one chooses not to participate, or one feels that he/she knows that he/she will unlikely participate in genealogy research during his/her lifetime. Also, an “uninterested” individual looks upon genealogy with negativity or contempt.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Unfortunately, few sources were found that involved both subjects of millennials and genealogy in a study together. As a result, two concepts, genealogical motivations and millennials, were researched separately for the study.

MOTIVATION STUDIES

GENEALOGY MOTIVATIONS THROUGHOUT TIME

To get a good sense of what motivates someone to become a genealogist, the history of genealogy motivations was explored. Humans have been both motivated and apathetic to research family roots since the beginning of time. If one looks back on past civilizations and centuries, one can see that cultural and historical events have influenced how civilizations throughout time have looked back at their past.

KINGS, PEDIGREES, AND RIGHTS TO THE THRONE

Motivations in looking up family roots go back to the times of emperors and kings of human civilizations. In countries such as Japan, India, Sumer, and England, for example, kings were motivated to look into their past in order to prove their royalty rights to the throne.²¹ The legitimacy of royalty was so important to kingdoms that courts had

²¹ Martin Hadis, "From Generation to Generation: Family Stories, Computers and Genealogy." PhD. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002.
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.475.5115&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

staff commit to memory the royal family's lineage and pass on the story of the lineage from one generation to the next through oral histories. In Japan, Ireland, and Germany, for example, jobs existed for the task of recording, reciting, and preserving the ancestry of chiefs and heads of state.²²

FEELINGS OF GENEALOGY AMONG AMERICAN COLONISTS DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

Genealogical motivation was also present during the American Revolution (late 1760's to 1780's). In contrast to how kings and emperors were motivated to look up their family's past in order to prove their rights to the throne, American colonists, were not, inspired to look up their British roots. The American Revolution was a time of rebellion where Americans wished to break free of their bondage from their English roots and traditions. The colonists wanted to strike out on their own and make their own rules. American pioneers held genealogy in contempt because they thought it a bit snobbish. Aristocracy, which was favored by the Puritan way of life in England, gave one privileges in life and made it difficult for someone of lower status to rise above their class despite having talent, intelligence, or life ambitions. Colonists frowned upon the rules of aristocracy and wanted to live in a place where one's family ties played no part in achieving success.²³ Even after the Revolutionary War and after the U.S. won its independence from England, the rivalry between colonists and their English counterparts still lingered. A colonist would have been thought of as suspicious if he/she tried to research his or her British roots. Genealogy at that time was seen as tied to the British

²² Ibid.

²³ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country.*; New York Cambridge University Press, 1985: 105-107.

elite and was discouraged by American colonists who did not believe in hierarchy rule. Even former president George Washington knew that keeping quiet about his ancestral past was the best thing to do during such a time.²⁴ Long after the American Revolution, people wanted to forget their English past. The newly-proclaimed nation did not want to owe anything to their English motherland. Under English rule, Americans felt inferior, thus colonists were ashamed to acknowledge their English ancestry.²⁵ The rivalry between Americans and the British influenced how people looked at genealogy, which in this time period was not encouraged.

A TIME FOR REFLECTION: 1880S-1890S

One hundred years after the American Revolution, the era of bitterness between Americans and the British waned, and Americans found themselves in a different situation where it was seen as acceptable to look back into their past to see how far they had come since their independence from Britain. As a result, many patriotic societies were established such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Colonial Dames of America, the Mayflower Society and the General Society of Colonial Wars.²⁶ There was a need by Americans to research American social history and a desire to find illustrious ancestors. One historian noted this period as a “craze that swept America in the 1880s and 1890s.”²⁷ During this time, it was seen as acceptable to reflect, remember, and acknowledge one’s own identity.

²⁴ Elizabeth Shown Mills, “Genealogy in the Information Age: History’s New Frontier,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 91, no. 91 (2003): 262.

²⁵ Lowenthal, *The past is a Foreign Country*, 122.

²⁶ Russell E. Bidlack, “Genealogy Today,” *Library Trends* 32, no. 1 (1983): 10.

²⁷ Peter Andrews, “Genealogy- The Search for a Personal Past,” *American Heritage* 33, no. 5 (1982): par. 12.

HOME LIFE PRIOR TO THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

During the late 1800's, prior to the Industrial Revolution, the home was the center of family life. In fact, it was common for four family generations to live under the same roof.²⁸ It was typical for children to grow up with their grandparents in the same house and to hear family stories from their grandparents. These stories were passed on to their own children when they became parents."²⁹ It was easy for family members to know their family's history since elders lived nearby.³⁰ "In the days before radio and television, storytelling was the major source of family entertainment."³¹ During this era, people were motivated to learn about their family history because of the close relationships that developed as a result of living with generations of family in close proximity.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The arrival of the Industrial Revolution a couple of decades later in the late 1800s literally broke up the traditional family structure along with people's ability to learn about their past. It was a time of major change. The introduction of the telephone allowed for faster communication, and the development of cars and trains allowed Americans more freedom and mobility to move about the country.³² The structured family life that Americans once knew prior to the Industrial Revolution changed forever. Americans started working farther away from home and commuting longer distances. Instead of taking whatever jobs came to them, Americans started traveling to those jobs.

²⁸ Amanda Smith Barusch and Peter Steen, "Keepers of Community in a Changing World," *Generations* 20, no. 1, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, EBSCOhost (accessed March 30, 2016). (1996): 49-52.

²⁹ Vera Rosenbluth, *Keeping Family Stories Alive: Discovering and Recording the Stories and Reflections of a Lifetime* (Point Roberts, WA: Hartley & Marks Publishers, 1997), 23.

³⁰ Hadis, "From Generation to Generation," 23.

³¹ Rosenbluth, *Keeping Family Stories Alive*, 5.

³² Bidlack, "Genealogy Today," 11

Families as a result soon became dispersed.³³ Increased movement of people took its toll on family history records, which were often destroyed or hastily thrown away during the process of moving.³⁴ Although the Industrial Revolution was an important time of cultural change that brought with it the development of new inventions and increased mobility, it was also a difficult time where Americans were given fewer chances to bond with their families and to get to know their family's history.

IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY

The Industrial Revolution also brought an influx of immigrants to the United States, resulting in a two-sided look into how people viewed their family roots during this time. With Europeans coming from the east and Asians coming from the west, newly admitted immigrants to America wished to become more American and tried hard to blend into their new home. Remembering their past in the "old country" took very low priority for immigrants and so it is possible that many memories of family history were forgotten on purpose during this time. Their wish to assimilate also affected their children who were not taught the traditional ways of the "old country" by their parents. Their children were also embarrassed by their parents' heavy accents and customs. They never asked about their parents' past until it was too late.³⁵

At the same time that immigrants were making their new homes in the United States, genealogy became very popular among Americans who did not welcome immigrants entering the United States. They viewed immigrants as a threat to the

³³ Barusch and Steen, "Keepers of community in a changing world," 49- 52

³⁴ Bidlack, "Genealogy Today", 9

³⁵ Ibid, 9- 10.

American life.³⁶ The head of the National Genealogy Society at the time argued that the human race was being ruined by “degeneracy and decay of modern society” and the “negative” influence of immigrants.³⁷ Such prejudice motivated Americans to look to their family roots as an assurance of their American-ness and as way to distinguish themselves from the immigrants entering the United States at the time.

ROOTSMANIA IN 1976

Almost a half century later, the year of 1976 brought new cultural changes to American history. The TV series, *Roots*, based on the novel by Alex Haley was aired during this time. *Roots* was a story of Haley’s familial ancestral roots that traced back to one single ancestor named Kunta Kinte, who was captured from his home in West Africa and brought to America as a slave. The story unwinds with descendants of Haley’s family who lived through life in American slavery up to and ends with Haley’s generation in the 1970s. *Roots* took America by storm. *Roots* the TV series was so popular that an estimated 130 million people, almost half the U.S. population, watched at least one segment.³⁸ *Roots*, as a result, started a “Rootsmania” in America where finding out who you were was all the rage. As a result, Americans white and blacks across America rushed off to genealogy centers to find out about their pasts. Genealogy and historical libraries, for example, saw patrons double or triple in number.³⁹ Haley’s *Roots* was a

³⁶ Oscar Handlin, *Race and Nationality in American Life*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957)

³⁷ Dr. Joseph G. B. Bulloch, “The Problems That Now Confront Us,” NGS Quarterly 1 (October 1912): 39–41.

³⁸ Andrews, “Genealogy- The Search for a Personal Past,” par. 4.

³⁹ Bidlack, “Genealogy Today,” 11.

cultural phenomenon in American history that helped to motivate Americans to look up their family's past.

In regards to many of historic events in American history, time and culture influenced how people looked back upon their familial roots. Could it be possible that millennials are presently living through a cultural phenomenon today in 2016 that is strongly influencing how they feel about genealogy? Millennials, for example, are living through a technical age where computers, smartphones, tablets, mobile electronic devices, and the overall Internet connectivity to all devices are used daily. Is it possible that such devices could be influencing millennial involvement in genealogy?

STUDIES THAT HAVE INVESTIGATED MOTIVATIONS FOR DOING GENEALOGY

Some research studies have investigated genealogy motivations. Megan Smolenyak of *Ancestry Magazine*⁴⁰ interviewed two researchers who studied why people do genealogy. One of the two researchers that she interviewed was Pamela J. Drake, who wrote a thesis on genealogy as a graduate student at the California State University Fullerton. Drake conducted an online survey of 4,109 genealogists in March of 2001. The second researcher interviewed by Smolenyak was Dr. Kevin Meethan, a current professor of Sociology at the University of Plymouth, who studied over 1,000 family historians who completed an online questionnaire.⁴¹ Smolenyak asked both researchers questions about what they each found out about motivations in their studies. Meethan responded that there were many motivations. For example, individual curiosity was one type of motivation that he found among genealogists, especially curiosity of intellect and the

⁴⁰ Megan Smolenyak, "Who is the Genealogist Next Door?" *Ancestry Magazine* 21, no. 5 (September/October 2003): 15-20.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 16.

practical challenge of finding all missing pieces of the family. Another motivation he found was people's personal need to connect with the past, perhaps to get to know a familial ancestor or to travel to ancestral homelands to make family history relatable to them. He also found that genealogists did it for the sake of future generations in the family.⁴²

Pamela Drake responded to the same question and found that more people than ever have an interest in genealogy, but are not necessarily participating through genealogical societies and groups. Instead, such individuals conduct Internet research independently. Drake also found that genealogists are generative in nature, meaning that they do genealogy to give back to younger generations and leave a legacy.⁴³

Ronald D. Lambert also conducted a study on motivations of genealogists. Lambert, a current professor of Sociology at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, conducted his study in 1994 where he mailed out a questionnaire to 1,343 genealogists to find out genealogist triggers and motivations.⁴⁴ According to his survey's results, Lambert found that people did genealogy based on four popular reasons: 1) Developing a deeper understanding of self by understanding one's roots; 2) Getting to know ancestors as people; 3) Researching for future generations; and 4) Restoring forgotten ancestors to memory.⁴⁵ Minor reasons Lambert found in his study that were not as popular included reasons such as 1) To check a family story; 2) To study history; 3) To solve puzzles; 4) To enjoy being the family historian; 5) To feel competent; 6) To finish

⁴² Ibid, 20.

⁴³ Ibid, 19- 20.

⁴⁴ Lambert, "The Family Historian...", 118

⁴⁵ Ibid, 121.

the work of a family member; 7) To enjoy the company of other genealogists; and 8) To publish a book or article.⁴⁶ Lambert found that older genealogists in their 60's and 70's did genealogy for the sake of posterity while younger respondents under 40, on the other hand, expressed an interest in exploring their roots. Across the board, all age groups undoubtedly wanted to know their ancestors as people.⁴⁷

STUDIES ON TRIGGERS AND WHAT GETS PEOPLE GOING ON DOING GENEALOGY

Apart from motivations, the idea of triggers, that is, what gets people researching their family in the first place, was also investigated. In November of 2010, Dianne Haddad of *Family Tree Magazine* (FTM) interviewed five genealogists, 26 years old and younger, and asked all five of them how they each got their start in doing genealogy research. Seventeen year-old Megan Sharp from La Grange, GA answered,

*I've heard stories about my family members from the time I was a little girl. My maternal grandmother was the one who introduced me to genealogy research when I was around 10....*⁴⁸

Isaac Settle, 13, from Owensboro, KY answered the same question:

*My grandparents got me started when I was around 11. I am working on my mom's side, the Nalls, and finding pictures of ancestors. I spend about two hours a week, if not more. I try to go to the genealogy room at my local library once a week.*⁴⁹

FTM also interviewed D. Joshua Taylor, 26, from Boston and asked him how he got started in genealogy:

⁴⁶ Ibid, 125.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 134.

⁴⁸ Haddad, Diane, "Closing the Generation Gap," *Family Tree Magazine*, November 2010. Accessed 17 December 2015. <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/article/Closing-the-Generation-Gap>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

When I was 8, my mother took me to a Family History Center. When I was 10, I visited my grandparents, who were working at another Family History Center and joined them there almost every day. My grandmother showed me a census record of our ancestor John W. Allison in Galia County, Ohio and was trying to prove that the man listed above him was his father.⁵⁰

Family Tree Magazine interviewed 22 year-old A.C. Ivory of Taylorsville, UT. Here is Ivory's answer to the same question:

I needed to fill out a five-generation pedigree chart to take with me on my LDS mission, and I thought to myself, "I could ask Grandpa to fill out because he has done it all," but I figured I'd give it a try. As I was searching got bit by the genealogy bug.⁵¹

In addition, Smolenyak's interview with both genealogy researchers Drake and Meethan, also covered the types of triggers that got people going on researching genealogy. One major trigger to start genealogy research was the death of a family member. Similarly, when Smolenyak asked Meethan about what he found in his study on triggers, Meethan said that people are triggered by inheriting items like old photos and family Bibles; death in a family was another trigger. Interestingly, Meethan found that some survey subjects did not have a trigger and as they were interested in genealogy since childhood.⁵² According to Lambert's 1994 study, people got started with genealogy after realizing their own ignorance of the subject when they were asked questions about their family especially by their own children, prompting them to start researching. Lambert's study also revealed that people were triggered to do genealogy when they were personally encouraged by friends and family.⁵³ Additionally, a 2000 Martiz Marketing Research Inc. survey uncovered other triggers, such as hearing family stories, talking

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Smolenyak, "Who is the Genealogist Next Door?", 18

⁵³ Ibid.

with friends, colleagues or family members, meeting relatives for the first time, or having gone to family events like family reunions.⁵⁴

STUDIES THAT HAVE DISCUSSED MOTIVATIONS FOR NOT DOING GENEALOGY

Studies were also found that examined the motivations that discouraged people from researching the history of their family of which Russell Bidlack wrote about in 1983. He found that deception played a role in discouraging people from pursuing their roots. Many Americans, he explained, were played as gullible for buying plaques and paintings of coats of arms that they had been told were authentic, but in the end turned out to be fakes. Therefore, mistrust of genealogy organizations, of people, and of online information was one factor in why people did not do genealogy⁵⁵

Bidlack also found that people disliked doing genealogy when they find out how much hard work was involved. Some did not have the patience and curiosity to spend hours looking for names and dates online.⁵⁶ Genealogist D. Joshua Taylor agreed with Bidlack in a blog he wrote on millennials and genealogy stating that some impatient millennials preferred a quick 5-minute research of genealogy compared to the researching that took Baby Boomers years to find.⁵⁷

The issue of finding unexpected or unwanted information also discouraged people from further pursuing genealogy. Sometimes, one with a bad past wanted to forget a family event ever happened. This may be why genealogists of today have trouble finding family information in the “old country.” During the assimilation of immigrants in the late

⁵⁴ Maritz Marketing Research Inc., “Sixty Percent of Americans...,” <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/sixty-percent-of-americans-intrigued-by-their-family-roots-73184th067.html>

⁵⁵ Bidlack, “Genealogy Today,” 20.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 8

⁵⁷ Taylor, “Gen Y,” par. 4

18th century, as discussed earlier, immigrants wanted to forget their past in their homeland and start their life anew in America. The same goes for when someone found disturbing background information about their family that they wished they had not stumbled upon like a scandal, an illegitimate love affair, or even a crime.⁵⁸ David Lowenthal noted that shameful information on the family made the discoverer feel ashamed and embarrassed to reveal their background.⁵⁹

Money also played a factor in discouragement. Heather Collins who is one of the genealogy bloggers for Young and Savvy Genealogists.com, a website written by millennial genealogist bloggers, said that money was one of the issues that millennials faced when pursuing their family's history. In a blog post, Collins said that millennials were the biggest users of digital media, but they were unfortunately the biggest group mostly affected by genealogy website paywalls.⁶⁰

Snobbery was also seen as a discouragement according to writers Richard Conniff and Leo McKinstry. In his July 2007 article in *Smithsonian Magazine*, a summarization of Conniff's thoughts on genealogy stated that it is all bogus and useless, debating that all humans share the same ancestor who comes from Africa.⁶¹ Leo McKinstry similarly thought little of genealogy, seeing it as snobbish in nature. "It's nothing if you think you're related to royalty or someone famous. Who cares?" McKinstry states.⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid, 8

⁵⁹ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 29.

⁶⁰ Heather Collins, "The Historical and Genealogical Society of Tomorrow," Young & Savvy Genealogists (blog), September 1, 2015, <http://youngandsavvygenealogists.blogspot.com/2015/09/the-historical-and-genealogical-society.html>

⁶¹ Richard Conniff, "The Family Tree, Pruned: Its Lure is Powerful- but Genealogy is Meaningless, Relatively," *Smithsonian Magazine* 38 (July 2007): 90-97.

⁶² Leo McKinstry, "Sorry, but family history really is bunk," *The Spectator* (April 30, 2001), accessed October 4, 2015. <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2008/04/sorry-but-family-history-really-is-bunk/>

STUDIES AND RESEARCH ON MILLENNIAL GENERATION

Other than studying motivations and triggers of genealogy, studying millennials as a group is also important since doing so could perhaps provide an explanation and understanding of the way they behave today in regards to the genealogy community. Fortunately, studies have been done on millennials as a group, including one by Thom and Jess Rainer, the authors of *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. The Rainers' study involved 1,200 American millennials across the U.S., all born between 1980 and 1991, and all from different racial backgrounds.⁶³ Millennial education and intelligence was particularly looked at. The Rainers found that the millennial generation was intelligent overall. According to polls taken in the Rainer study, the millennials generation was labeled "the learning generation" because of their strong will to want to learn and make a difference in the world. About 60% of millennials enter college immediately after graduating high school.⁶⁴ When Rainer and Rainer asked their 1,200 subjects to respond to the sentence, "I have a great appetite for learning," 95% of millennials answered yes.⁶⁵ With high interest in learning, could this also mean that millennials might have a strong willingness to learn about their family's roots? Does this positive attitude towards the will to learn carry over to making important discoveries of family research? Ninety-six percent of them felt that they were capable of doing something great making a difference in the world somehow. Millennials

⁶³ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 4.

⁶⁴ Marcia Mogelonsky, "The Rocky Road to Adulthood," *American Demographics* 18, no. 5 (1996): 26-36.

⁶⁵ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 117- 118.

as Rainer and Rainer found out, have a lot of energy to do and learn things.⁶⁶ Perhaps having the will to learn family history is one of them?

MILLENNIAL VIEWS ON FAMILY

The Rainer study also looked at how millennials viewed the concept of family. After surveying 1,200 American millennials, the survey revealed that family is very important to millennials; they want to be involved in family affairs, believe in family connection, and value family tradition.⁶⁷ Another survey in the Rainer study asked all 1,200 American millennials the following question: “What is really important in your life?” The most frequent answer with 61% of votes was family.⁶⁸ A similar survey conducted by the Pew Research Center reported that millennials ranked family values at the top of their list as important while fame and fortune was seen at the bottom of the list.⁶⁹

The value of family among millennials was also explored through a study conducted by Neosho Ponder, who completed his dissertation in May 2015 on African American college students at Howard University. In his study, Ponder investigated the idea of “communalism”, an African term referring to reliance on friends within a tight-knit community beyond the immediate family, and the use of the social media website, Facebook, to keep in touch with this family-like community.⁷⁰ In his study, Ponder

⁶⁶ Ibid, 169.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 70

⁶⁸ Ibid, 74-75

⁶⁹ “Millennials: Confident, Connected, Open to Change.” Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project RSS. February 23, 2010, 17, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/02/24/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change/>

⁷⁰ Neosho C. Ponder, “We are Family: Use of Facebook by Howard University People to Maintain Communalism,” Order No. 3742214, Howard University, 2015. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1755669555?accountid=14244>.

found that Howard University African American students used Facebook as a means to stay in touch with not just immediate family, but also others (friends) that made up the support group of the student. Ponder, as a result, found that family is important to African American college students.⁷¹

Review of these studies on millennials and family values supports the fact that most millennials are overwhelmingly supportive of the value of family. Could this value for family in millennials also be carried over to an interest in genealogy research?

MILLENNIALS RECEIVE A BAD REPUTATION THAT THEY'RE NOT INTERESTED IN GENEALOGY

Despite studies conducted on millennials revealing their intelligence, it appears that the millennial generation still does not receive enough credit for intelligence and is labeled as not being interested in genealogy. A number of blogs that were encountered supported this idea.

For example, a 2014 blog post written by genealogy professional Tom MacEntee addressed the idea that millennials overall did not have the capacity to be interested in genealogy. He further commented that millennials lost interest in genealogy at the beginning of their high school years and did not regain interest until they surpassed their 20's and 30's. MacEntee, a member of the Baby Boomer generation, worried that the

⁷¹ Michael L. Hecht, Ronald L. Jackson, and Sidney A. Ribeau. *African American Communication: Exploring Identity and Culture*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2003), 1-308

millennial generation would not be interested in family genealogy like the Baby Boomers were.⁷²

An article written by an unknown blogger titled “Could Gaming Get Millennials Interested in Genealogy?” expressed a similar concern that millennials were not interested in genealogy and that one way to engage them was through video gaming. D. Joshua Taylor, who was referenced in the article, said that video games offer millennials an escape to another world and both allow for networking through websites, social media, and conferences. Again, similar to MacEntee’s blog post, there is the assumption that millennials do not care about genealogy and that their interest can and must be teased out in some way.⁷³

It appears that stereotypes about genealogy belonging to an older audience still exist today. In a 2009 journal by Crystal Fulton, she noted that genealogy is often popular among retirees or those less constrained due to an empty nest at home⁷⁴ Australian genealogist Alona Tester said in her 2013 article “Don’t Stereotype a Genealogist” that genealogy has been stereotyped as belonging to only genealogists of Baby Boomer age and that it needs to stop. “It’s no longer an older generation thing anymore,” she said. “Younger genies [a nickname short for genealogists] are getting into it now whether older genies like it or not. They have as much of an interest as older genies do,” Tester said.⁷⁵

⁷² Tom MacEntee, “Genealogy and Family History- Boom or Bust?” *LinkedIn.com* (blog). March 27, 2014, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140327173346-31267915-genealogy-and-family-history-industry-boom-or-bust>

⁷³ “Could Gaming Get Millennials Interested in Genealogy?” *Familytree.com* (blog). March 6, 2014, <http://www.familytree.com/blog/could-gaming-get-millennials-interested-in-genealogy/>

⁷⁴ Crystal Fulton, “Quid Pro Quo: Information Sharing in Leisure Activities,” *Library Trends* 57, No. 4 (2009): 758.

⁷⁵ Alona Tester, “Don’t Stereotype a Genealogist.” *Genealogy and History News* (blog). August 22, 2013. <http://www.gouldgenealogy.com/2013/08/dont-stereotype-a-genealogist/>

Similarly, twenty-two year-old genealogist enthusiast A.C. Ivory of Taylorsville, Utah shared a similar opinion within an interview he had with *Family Tree Magazine* regarding genealogy practice among millennials: “It’s [genealogy] not ‘just for old people.... I teach them [referencing his friends] that you are never too young to learn where you come from....”⁷⁶

Lambert pondered this same perplexity about genealogy stereotypes and said that the reason why middle aged people got more attention in the genealogy community is because they were more visible to the world and were most likely to join genealogical societies.⁷⁷ There also lingers the question of whether there is animosity between Baby Boomers and millennials. According to the Rainer millennial study, the relationship between Boomers and millennials was overall healthy. But still, some 15% of millennials felt that some Boomers underestimated their intelligence and abilities because of their youth.⁷⁸

Based on these studies, there is reason to suspect that there are people who believe that millennials are simply not motivated and interested in genealogy and need assistance in boosting their interest. It appears that millennials are unfairly labeled by others (especially those from older generations) as lazy, uncaring, selfish, and uninterested in family.

⁷⁶ Haddad, “Closing the Generation Gap,” <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/article/Closing-the-Generation-Gap>

⁷⁷ Smolenyak, “Who is the Genealogist Next Door?”, 17.

⁷⁸ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 169.

MILLENNIALS ACTIVE IN GENEALOGY TODAY

In truth, millennials are in fact widely involved in the genealogy community. After studying the genealogist population, Dr. Kevin Meethan said that it is safe to assume that the genealogical community is getting younger than we think.⁷⁹ Dianne Haddad from *Family Tree Magazine* (FTM) interviewed millennials under the age of 26 in November of 2010 about what they thought of millennials getting involved in the genealogy community. Megan Sharp, 17, answered:

*I think many kids my age are interested in where they come from, probably now more than ever. The Internet makes the world a smaller place. Genealogy research does much the same thing; it connects us to people all over the world.*⁸⁰

Joshua Taylor, 26, from Boston at the time of the interview was asked the same question and responded:

*I think 'Who Do You Think You Are?' is introducing a new generation to genealogy. Also, the availability of online records changes the first experiences for genealogists.*⁸¹

Similarly, findmypast.com in 2013 also interviewed a number of millennials who are also actively involved in the genealogical community to discuss with them what projects they undertook in regards to genealogy. Those at findmypast.com were pleased to find that some members of the millennial generation took interest in genealogy research, conducted research, and kept genealogy organizations thriving.⁸² One millennial, Elyse Doerflinger from Southern California was 23 years old at the time of

⁷⁹ Smolenyak, "Who is the Genealogist Next Door?", 17

⁸⁰ Haddad, "Closing the Generation Gap," <http://www.familytreemagazine.com/article/Closing-the-Generation-Gap>

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Amy Sell, "Youth in Genealogy: Generation Y Redefines Family History Research, *Findmypast.com* (blog), January 25, 2013. <https://blog.findmypast.com/youth-in-genealogy-generation-y-redefines-family-history-research-14060449013.html>

her interview with findmypast.com. Today, she is currently a professional genealogist who specializes in using technology tools to make family research easier and more efficient for researchers. In her career as a genealogist, she created her own genealogy blog (Elyse's Genealogy blog,⁸³ made a number of YouTube videos to share her knowledge about genealogy to the public, and wrote for *Internet Magazine* and *Family Chronicle Magazine* and spoke at genealogy societies and conferences in Southern California.⁸⁴

Nick Gombash is another example of a millennial currently active in the genealogical community. At the time he was interviewed by findmypast.com, he was 26 years old from Chicago, IL and already conducted 12 years of genealogy research as a hobby plus five years of research as a genealogical professional. His current area of expertise lies within Hungarian and Germanic-speaking countries, and in February of 2010, he created www.hungaryexchange.com, a non-profit genealogy website and Facebook group that provides free indexes and records of Hungarian genealogy to help people research their Hungarian family roots.⁸⁵

Darcie Posz is another fine example of millennials actively involved in genealogy today. Currently, Posz is a professional genealogist and at the time of the interview, had been active in genealogy for more than nine years. Her current specialty lies within Hawaiian/ Polynesian genealogy and urban ancestors. Posz has also published her works

⁸³ Elyse Doerflinger, "Elysegenealogyblog.com," accessed September 18, 2015, <http://elysesgenes.blogspot.com/>

⁸⁴ Amy Sell, "Youth in Genealogy," <https://blog.findmypast.com/youth-in-genealogy-generation-y-redefines-family-history-research-14060449013.html>

⁸⁵ Ibid.

in various journals including the *Federation of Genealogical Societies* and *National Genealogy Society Magazine*. More of her research is housed at Columbia University.⁸⁶

Studies of how active millennial college students are in researching their family have also been investigated. Brigham Young University (BYU) doctoral student, Matthew Reiser, for example, did his 2012 dissertation on how research of family within a genealogy class at BYU effected the thinking of how college undergraduates looked at genealogy. In his study, he found that students overall became much more interested in their family and felt that the research made a profound effect on their lives.⁸⁷ One student in Reiser's study commented on how the research affected him/ her overall:

*I think that family history benefits me as I gain more knowledge of my family. I have a stronger identity of who I am...but just knowing where you come from, it really helps you to realize who you are.*⁸⁸

It is important to note, however, that Reiser's study was conducted within BYU, a Mormon-based university where genealogy is a part of typical academic curriculum. Despite the fact that the study appeared biased towards genealogy, Reiser's study should instead be seen as a window into witnessing that millennials are active agents in the genealogy community. These recent studies show that members of the millennial generation are indeed active in the field of genealogy? Will the survey for this study also reveal that millennials at UNC are active as well?

Studies encountered throughout the literature review will be used as a guide for the researcher's study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Results of past

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Matthew Reiser, "Exploring Genealogical Roots and Family History and their Influence on College Student Development: A Qualitative Study" (2012) All Theses and Dissertations. Paper 3,356, 14.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 33.

genealogy surveys will be used by the researcher to see if millennials have the same reactions or if there are any differences that have developed over time.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH SURVEY

The researcher wanted to know if results and ideas from past surveys related to the overall millennial student population at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, located in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She used conclusions from past surveys on motivations, non-motivations, triggers, genealogical activities as a guide to construct a survey of her own and borrowing ideas and molding them into potential questions. Would millennials at UNC respond the same as past genealogical surveys or would responses be different?

The researcher designed an electronic genealogy survey⁸⁹ using Qualtrics, a survey software. She sought out all current students attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who fit her preferred definition of a millennial: born between the years of 1978 and 1995. There were no gender preferences. It also did not matter if people were American or international, as diversity of survey takers were welcomed. The survey was constructed completely in English.

The 20-question survey was designed to gather information about genealogical activities that people had already participated in, their current interest level, their motivations or non-motivations for doing genealogy, the triggers that got them started, how long they had been researching genealogy and any discouragements they

⁸⁹ Survey can be seen in Appendix A and workflow of questions can be seen in Appendix B

encountered while doing research. People were not asked for their full names or email addresses. It was disclosed to them that any information they shared openly was to be kept confidential.

To gauge the different levels of interest in genealogy, three sets of questions were designated by the researcher based on 3 different interest levels. The defined levels are as follows: 1) Level 1, called the “extreme level”, classified people who enjoyed learning about their family and got something fulfilling from doing family research; 2) Level 2, called the “low interest level” classified people in this level who knew they did not like genealogy, did not think much of it and probably would not engage much with it within their lifetime.; 3) Level 3, called the “in-between level”, described people who identified themselves as non-participants of genealogical activities, but still had a genealogical interest. See Figure 1 below for a basic layout of questions arranged by level.

All respondents	Level 1 (High interest)	Level 2 (No interest)	Level 3 (In between)
What is your age?	What triggered your interest?	Why aren't you interested in participating in genealogy activities?	Do you still have any interest in participating in genealogy activities?
What is your gender?	What motivates you?	What didn't you like about participating in genealogical activities?	Your current reasons for lack of participation in genealogy?
What are genealogical activities you've done or are currently doing?	How long have you actively been involved in genealogy?	Is there anything that would change your mind about genealogy?	
Did you enjoy the activities?	Any barriers or discouragements you've encountered in trying to know about your family?		
Rate yourself on self-interest in genealogy?			
Is family a personal value to you?			

Figure 1

Initially, survey takers started the survey by answering the same first few questions together as a whole. However, people branched off into one of three different levels based on the manner in which they answered. In this survey, question 4 is where survey

takers were separated into particular categories. Once separated, participants answered questions based on the category they were placed in. Eventually, all levels merged back together and ended the survey answering the same questions. For further clarity, a visual layout of all survey questions in a workflow chart can be found in Appendix B.

The researcher planned to disperse her survey by asking department Deans to post the survey onto their department's listservs, eventually reaching the email boxes of students. The researcher contacted the Deans of 14 different schools at UNC: School of Information and Library Science, the Graduate School, the Kenan-Flagler Business School, School of Media and Journalism, School of Education, School of Law, the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Medicine, the School of Nursing, the Gillings School of Global Public Health, the Eshelman School of Pharmacy, School of Dentistry, School of Government, and the School of Social Work. Contacting Deans occurred in the middle of February 2016. The survey ended up being dispersed to four schools out of the original solicited 14: the School of Information and Library Science listserv, which went to 830 people, the Business School listserv with 3,339 people, the School of Education with 500 people on the listserv, and the School of Public Health with over 1,700 people. It was assumed then that survey reached 6,369 UNC people. The other 10 schools that were also solicited denied the researcher's request to disperse her survey on the department's listserv or never returned a response.

The survey launched on February 16, 2016 and remained open for 12 days, closing on February 28, 2016 when the number of survey takers trickled down to one response a day. Altogether, 342 responses were collected. Data were analyzed by first separating the data of people with interest from those with no interest. Different answers,

number of participants, and numerous open-ended responses were read and tallied. After cleaning the data, 309 responses remained for analysis.

There were three reasons for discarding 33 reasons: 1) The respondent was not within the age range of 20 to 37; 2) The respondent who fit the age range only answered questions on age and gender and then quit the survey; or 3) The respondent fitting the age range initiated the survey, but answered no questions. Originally, there were 10 respondents who were 19 years-old or younger, nine respondents who were 38 years-old or older, and 14 respondents who either answered some questions and terminated the survey or answered no questions at all. The researcher determined that these three types of responses held data that was not relevant to the study and as a result were discarded.

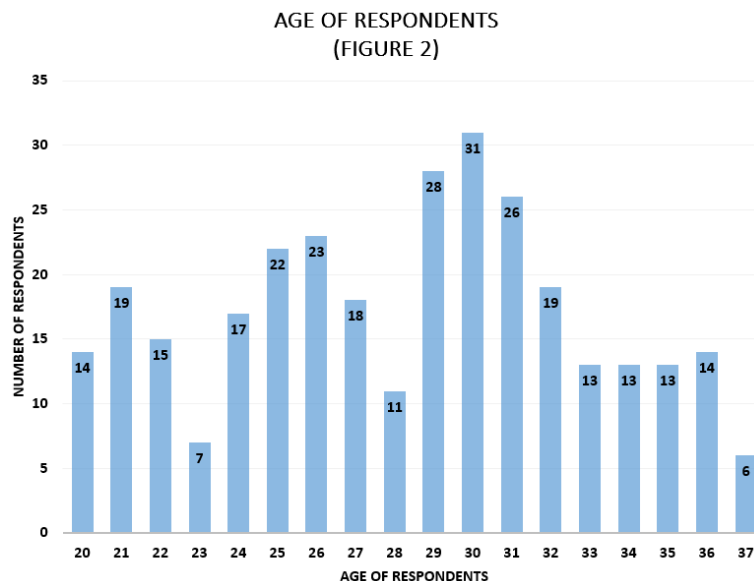
RESULTS

Before discussing survey results, the reader should note that even though 309 people participated in this survey, participants were allowed to skip questions with the exception of questions that were mandatory. In addition, some questions allowed for multiple answers to be chosen. Therefore, the number of responses to individual questions varied.

Survey results will be discussed starting with the questions that were asked of all participants. Then, questions that were based on different interest levels (1-3) will follow.

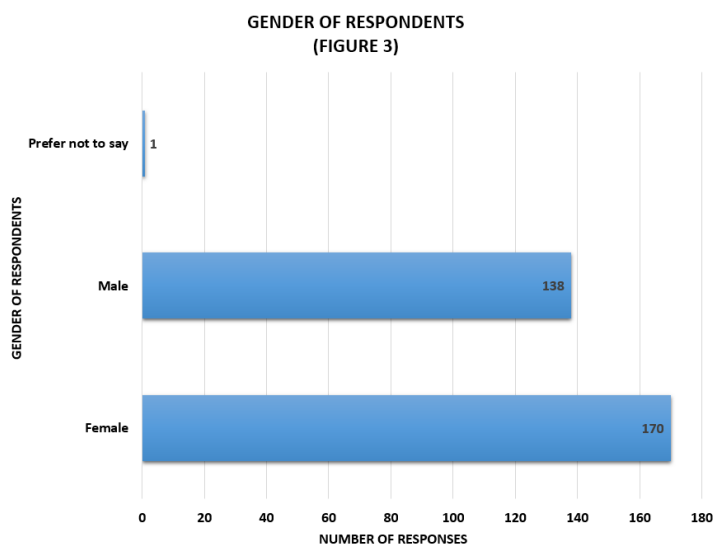
AGE OF RESPONDENTS

All 309 respondents were asked for their age upon beginning the survey. All ages within the research sample range (20 years to 37 years of age) were represented. The average test taker was 27 years old and respondents between 29 and 31 years of age were most frequently represented. (See Figure 2)



GENDER

All 309 respondents were also asked to identify their gender. More women answered the survey than men. Women answered the survey 170 times (55% of respondents) while men answered 138 times (45% of respondents). Although one student chose not to declare his or her gender, it did not drastically affect survey results. (See Figure 3).



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU DONE OR ARE CURRENTLY DOING TO GET TO KNOW YOUR FAMILY’S HISTORY?

In question 3, all 309 people were asked about what kind of genealogy activities they had already done in the past or continue to do today. People answered the question by picking multiple activities from a given activity list.⁹⁰ The most popular answer that was chosen 261 times was “asking family members questions about their past.” The second most popular answer was “attending family reunions”, chosen by 152 people. The answers “documenting everyday family events” (the third popular answer) got 138 votes and “collecting artifacts” (the fourth popular answer) received 132 votes. The activities of “online research” and “constructing family trees” each received 128 votes, making them tied for the fifth popular answer. Less popular answers that made up less than 10% of votes included “joining genealogy organizations”, “writing/ blogging about their family’s history”, “creating a family website”, “attending genealogy workshops”, and “creating artwork of any medium”. Ten people who answered “other” commented that they did additional activities such as DNA testing, preserving/ purchasing old family farm land, getting involved with the National Geographic Genographic Project, sharing family information with others online or in person or just viewing family work on family related websites. Twenty-three people however indicated that they did not participate in any of the activities listed in the question.

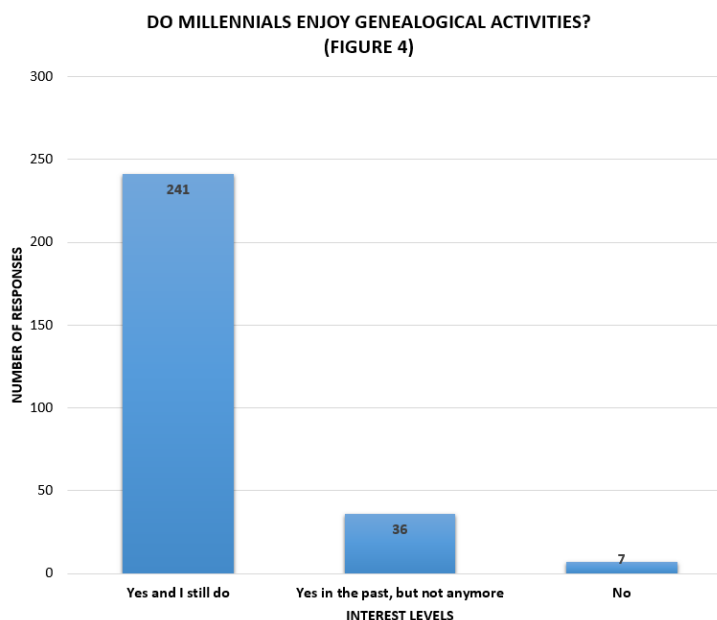
People were given the option to further elaborate on the activities they chose from question 3 and write more about it in question 12. Only 99 people of the original 309 decided to do so. Reading the open-ended responses revealed that the projects that people

⁹⁰ To see list of activities that people were asked to choose from, refer to appendix A, question 3

did ranged widely from the very simple to the very complex. Respondent 212, a 33 year-old male, for example, talked about how he simply got involved with genealogy just by conversing with his family whenever they got together during the holidays. Respondent 155, a 25 year-old female, on the other hand, explained a complex, but unique family project she was involved with which included collecting farm land and restoring an old log cabin that was built by her family over 150 years ago. Along with her brother and father, respondent 155 purchased pieces of farm land that once belonged to her family that gradually got chipped away from family ownership over the years. She and her family are currently trying to restore the family farm to its original state.

ARE THESE ACTIVITIES YOU ENJOY(ED)?

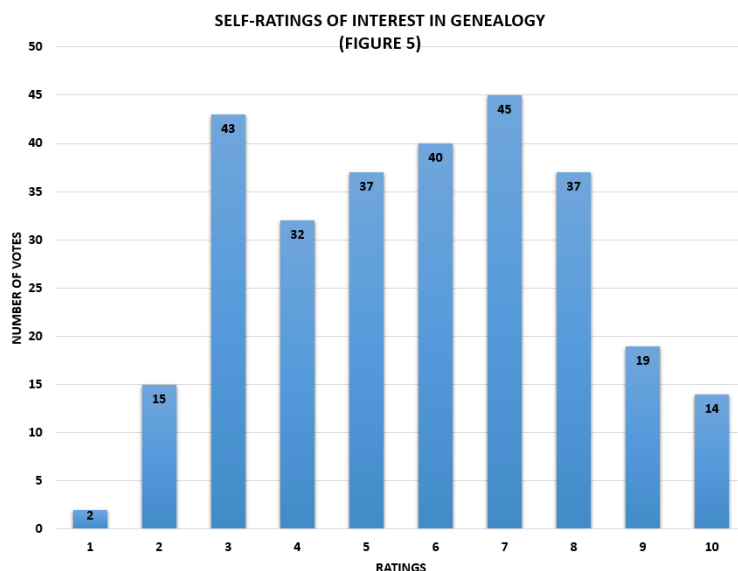
In question 4, people were asked about what genealogical activities they had done. People were then asked if they enjoyed what they did and were asked to pick among the three of the following answers: 1) “Yes and I still do”; 2) “Yes in the past, but not anymore”; or 3) “No”. Out of the 284 people who answered this question, 241 people (making up 85% of the votes) answered “yes and I still do” while 36 people (making up 13% of votes) answered that they once had an interest but not anymore, and seven people (2% of votes) outright said that they did not like the genealogical activities at all. See Figure 3.



It is important to note that this question was used to split the survey into three distinctive levels of interest and split off separate questions to survey takers based on how they answered this question. Those who answered “Yes and I still do” continued on to answer Level 1 questions while those who answered “Yes, in the past, but not anymore” and “no” were led on to answer Level 2 questions.

PLEASE RATE YOUR CURRENT OVERALL INTEREST TOWARDS GENEALOGY

All survey respondents of all interest levels (approximately 284 people) answered the question in which they were all asked to rate themselves regarding their overall interest towards genealogy using a Likert scale where “1” equaled the least interest and “10” equaled the most interest. The mean of the rating equaled 5.76, but people most frequently rated themselves as a “7” which was chosen 45 times. A “1” rating only received two votes, the least popular number. See Figure 5.



DO YOU BELIEVE THAT FAMILY IS A STRONG PERSONAL VALUE?

Question 19 asked respondents if family was a personal value to them. Out of the overall 284 responses to this question, 263 responses thought that the concept of family was a strong personal value to them as individuals. Meanwhile, 7% (21 people) thought otherwise.

WHAT FIRST TRIGGERED YOUR INTEREST IN GENEALOGY?

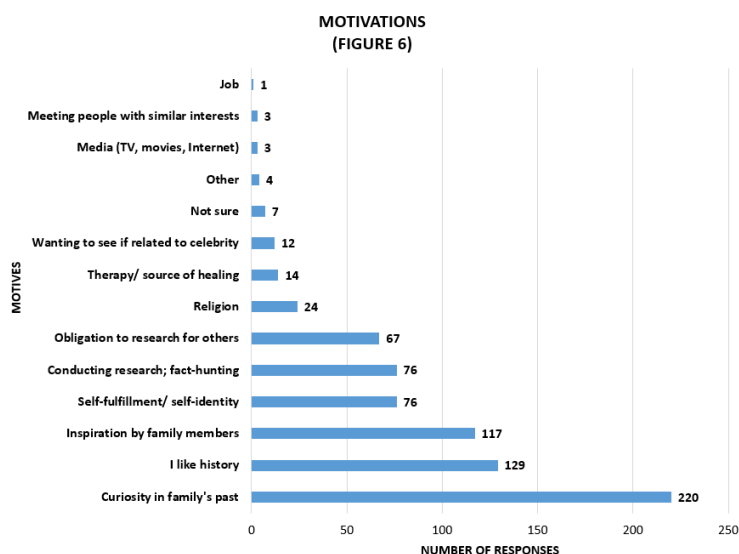
Question 7 was asked specifically to people who identified themselves as having Level 1 interest. There were 243 responses all together for this answer which allowed people to choose only one answer. With 72 responses at 30% of the vote, “personal curiosity” was the number one trigger that got people involved with genealogical activity in the first place. “Inspiration by a family member or friend” was the second most popular answer with 41 responses at 17%. “Hearing a family story” ranked as the third popular answer, receiving 37 responses at 15%. Unfortunately, 18 people who answered this question could not remember or did not know how they got started in the hobby.

Media (such as TV, movies, and books), one of the trigger answers for this question, was surprisingly one of the least influential factors to trigger genealogical interest in millennials; TV shows and movies each claimed one student vote each. Apparently, no millennial at UNC has been influenced by reading a book. Those who answered “other” said that they were triggered by other things like ancestry.com commercials, the family business, religion, work, and family landholdings. People who also answered “other” said that they did not really have a trigger because they had done genealogy their entire life.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO CONDUCT GENEALOGY OR WANT TO ENGAGE IN IT?

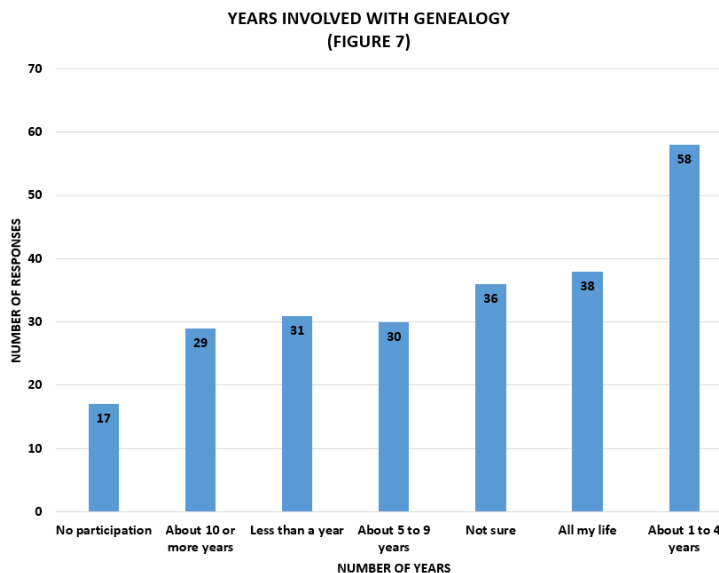
Question 9, which was also asked to people with Level 1 interest, asked people about their motivations in pursuing genealogy. A total of 239 respondents answered this multiple choice question. According to results (see Figure 6), it turns out that “personal curiosity” was the most popular motivation for the people which received 220 responses with a 92% response rate. The second most popular motivation was the “love for history” with 129 responses at a 54% response rate. “Influence of family members (alive or dead)” was the third most popular motivation with 117 responses and 49% of votes. People also indicated that a “need for self-fulfillment” and “conducting research/ fact-hunting” were also popular motivations, each receiving 76 responses at a 32 % rate. People indicated that they also did genealogy out of “obligation”, either for their children or for others in their family (with 67 responses at 28%). The least popular motivations that received less than 10% of votes included “religion”, “source for healing/ therapy”, “looking for someone famous they are related to”, “media”, “meeting people with similar interests”, and “job”. Four people who responded “other” said that they had other

motivations that drove their interest including school projects and wanting to know the geographic origin of where their family came from. Unfortunately, seven people did not know what drove their interest.



HOW LONG HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN GENEALOGY FAMILY HISTORY?

In question 11, Level 1 interest people were asked how long they had been involved in genealogy, specifically in reference to years. (See Figure 7) Out of 239 responses, about 24% (58 people) said that they had been doing something genealogically related for at least “one to four years”, which was the most popular answer. The second most popular answer was “all my life,” answered by 38 people at a 16% rate. Thirty-one people said that they were involved for “less than a year”, 30 people said that they have been involved for about “five to nine years”, while 29 people said that they had been involved for “10 years or more”! Seventeen people, however, said that they had not been participating at all. Clearly, we can see that UNC millennials are involved.



HAS SOMEONE OR SOMETHING EVER LEFT YOU FEELING DISCOURAGED FROM RESEARCHING YOUR FAMILY BECAUSE OF YOUR YOUTH?

Question 13 was the last question to be asked of Level 1 participants regarding interest. They were asked if anything caused them to feel discouraged about finding out about the history of their families. Altogether, 223 people replied. Of these, 201 people (90% of participants) reported that nothing bothered them or stood in the way of knowing about family. Twenty-two people (10% of respondents), on the other hand, said that someone or something did in fact present some kind of barrier to them.

WHY AREN'T YOU INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN ANY ACTIVITIES?

Results from questions 14 and 15 asked Level 2 interest people why they were not involved with the genealogy community today and what they did not like about the hobby. Both questions sought out specifics in the person's dissatisfaction with genealogy. The only difference between questions 14 and 15 was context. Question 14 was asked to people who once enjoyed genealogical activities during an earlier part of their life, but currently no longer do. Question 15, on the other hand, was asked to people

who never declared a liking for genealogy in their life. Since results in both questions were almost the same and since more participants answered question 15 (50 responses) compared to question 14 (16 responses), the researcher will focus results mainly on results from question 15. Out of the 50 responses, the number one answer for people not engaging in genealogy was the “lack of time” with 31 responses at 62% of the votes. “Lack of interest” was ranked second with 23 responses at 46% of the vote. “Too much hard work” was reason number three which received 11 responses at 22%. “Lack of patience” came in at a close fourth, while “skepticism of family records found online”, “lack of money”, and the “belief that we all come from the same ancestor” all came in fifth, each capturing seven votes. The least popular answer with votes numbering below 10% included the belief that “genealogy was for older people” (five responses), “other” (four responses), participant “did not feel their family was important enough to be researched” (three responses), and “personal fear” (one response). Apparently, none of the people thought that genealogy was bogus. Those who answered “other” further elaborated that their relatives had done the work for them or that they wanted to look up information about their family, but they just did not have the information they needed (i.e. names and locations) to begin research.

In question 16, respondents were allowed to elaborate more freely on their reasons given in question 15. For those who answered “lack of interest” in question 15, they were prompted to tell me more about what they meant. Respondent 39, a 32 year - old female, for example, told me that genealogy was of low interest to her because of its non-relevance to her life: “The past is the past, I don't think genealogy would affect me today.” Respondent 171, a 35 year-old male, said he valued his time and did not want to

pursue something he did not feel passionate about: “The interest level isn't high enough to want to devote my precious time (=money) [sic] and put forth the effort to tracking this down.” Interestingly, “lack of interest” took on a different perspective when a 34 year-old male (a.k.a. Respondent 115) told me that he was interested in researching only as far as his great grandparents, but no further than that generation. Two people expressed concern about genealogy clubs being unwelcoming by raising their membership standards too high. Two other people responded that they were not interested because the grunt work had already been done for them by other family members. The least common answers had to do with personal problems like experiencing embarrassing family drama, having lack of information to begin research, encountering language barriers to obtain information, or having financial problems. However, I found it interesting that eight of the 21 individuals who did answer this question expressed an interest in pursuing research once a barrier that currently stood in their way was resolved like settling down in life or establishing their career.

IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WOULD CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT GENEALOGY?

Question 17, which asked if anything could have been done to change the minds of people who said that genealogy was of no interest to them, was also asked of people of Level 2 interest. There were 21 responses all together. Five out of the 21 people were sure of themselves that genealogy was not for them or at least not a priority. “Time” seemed to be a popular answer, whereby if they had more time in their lives to do it, they would re-consider. Interestingly, two people said it would depend on their family. Respondent 82, a 21 year-old female, for example, said that if she had a family worth

looking up, then she probably would change her mind about genealogy. Respondent 121, a 33 year-old female similarly said that if her family had done more notable things in the past, then she would feel more eager to do it. People also commented that the ease of doing research was a major factor for them. In other words, if family research was easier, than people would change their minds. Respondent 156, a 25 year-old male said, “I love genealogy if it was simpler and less time consuming I would do it.”

Through this question, respondents explained whether the problems they found with genealogy was able to sway their opinions on genealogy or not. Some respondents appeared to be open to change while some were pretty sure that they would not ever change their minds.

DO YOU HAVE AN INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVITIES SUCH AS THOSE LISTED IN THE PREVIOUS QUESTION?

The last set of questions will pertain to people classified under Level 3 interest, the level in which the researcher refers to as the “in-betweens” where students are not currently active in genealogy, but still have a strong interest. Twenty-three people indicated that they never participated in any genealogical activity in question 3. Therefore, I asked question 5 to see if the participants still had an interest in the activities despite the fact that they had never done any activities before. As a result, a majority of these people (15) stated that they were not interested (65%) while eight people said that they were still interested (35%). The eight people of this group, all classified as level 3 types, went on to answer question 6 while the remaining 15 continued on to answer Level 2 questions.

REASONS FOR CURRENT LACK OF PARTICIPATION?

Question 6, a Level 3 interest question, was answered by eight people who said that they never did any genealogical activities, but they did have an interest in participating. This question asked for an explanation of their non-participation, allowing people to pick multiple answers that applied to them. Out of the eight people who answered, “school” (receiving seven votes) and “work” (receiving five votes) were both the most popular answers for current lack of participation. The answer of “other” was also selected which indicates to the researcher that there are other reasons out there causing millennials to be non-participants. Curiously, “raising a family” was not chosen. This may be due to young age, not enough people to answer this question, or that it is difficult to raise a family while going to school. Results of this particular question suggests to me that millennials are currently busy with school, work, and other activities in life. For some, family history research does not take top priority in lives at the moment.

DISCUSSION

MOST MILLENNIALS ARE ACTIVE IN THE GENEALOGY COMMUNITY

The millennials who responded to this survey are indeed making an active effort in acknowledging their family's history. The answers to question 3 (which asked people about what genealogical activities they have done so far in their lives) made this clear. The researcher asked question three specifically to understand the activities the millennials took part in by the time they were surveyed. When people were asked in question 4 if they enjoyed the activities that they had done, an overwhelming 85% of people said that they did which indicates the heavy level of their activity. A likewise indication occurred in question 11 which provided a rough estimate of how long people had been involved with genealogy. Eighty-eight percent of respondents who answered question 11 indicated that they had been involved in genealogy, from "less than a year" to "all their lives". Indeed, millennials have and continue to be involved. This confirms to doubters, non-believers, and nay-sayers that they can no longer say that millennials are not active in genealogy because this survey shows that millennials, for the most part, are active. People in this survey have certainly spoken for themselves. It is true that millennials express their interest on different levels of activity ranging from extremely passionate to moderate. Regardless of activity level, it is apparent that millennials are active in the genealogical community.

MILLENNIAL CURIOSITY IN GENEALOGY IS GENERALLY HIGH

Millennial curiosity towards genealogy is high. Question 7, which asked people to identify the trigger that got them started in their genealogy interest, provided a strong response. “Personal curiosity” was identified by people as their number one trigger. The researcher has found that the triggers identified for millennials in this survey (e.g. personal curiosity, inspiration by family members, hearing a family story, etc.) are as diverse as the survey results discovered by previous researchers such as Dr. Kevin Meethan and Pamela Drake in Megan Smolenyak’s interview.⁹¹

Additionally, in question 9, in which students were asked to identify their motivations, curiosity in the family’s past was the number one motivation for students (220 out of 239 or 92%). Overwhelmingly, millennials who answered this question were indeed curious and want to know more about their family’s past. Thom and Jess Rainer’s 2011 study on American millennials concluded in a study that 95% of millennials have a great hunger for learning and education.⁹² The researcher acknowledges a connection between the stories and will make the intellectual assumption that the drive for education and learning is linked to curiosity about their family history.

TRIGGERS LINKED TO EMOTIONS AND LIFE CHANGES

In review of the open-ended answers to question 8 where people were asked to further elaborate on the one trigger that they identified in question 7, the researcher recognized a pattern. It appears that most triggers identified by people seem to have been influenced by their self-acknowledgement about some important occurrence in their lives,

⁹¹ Megan Smolenyak, “Who is the Genealogist Next Door?": 15-20.

⁹² Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 117- 118.

which ignited a long-lasting trigger of change within themselves. In question 8, Respondent 123, a 22 year-old female further elaborated on a trigger when she realized how important remembering family was to her as she was growing up:

As I grew up, I realized that if I didn't find out more I may not ever have the chance. I want to make sure I have strong bonds with my family and know more about them.

Respondent 256, a 36-year female remembered her trigger to genealogy on the day she interviewed her grandparents for a school assignment, an interview she has never forgotten:

I don't remember exactly I have been interested for so long, but I do recall a school project in the 5th grade when we were supposed to ask our grandparents questions about their childhood and that did have an impact on me.

Respondent 129, a 30 year-old male didn't realize his interest in genealogy until after becoming a father and wishing for his kids to know about their roots:

The thought that my kids might not know about their history and where they came from and the rich history that my grandparents and their parents had. I wanted to document them. Especially as an Asian-American, I want them to know who is who and how to address them in Chinese, even if Chinese isn't their primary language.

As these three examples show, an occurrence of life changes are happening (i.e. realizing the importance of family history, realizing importance of talking to the grandparents, or realizing how important it is to pass on family knowledge to children). One may also notice that triggers, like the examples shown above, exhibit some kind of psychological need or want as a result of these realizations. All the respondents above, are exhibiting some kind of need: A need to know about family, a need to remember an interview with grandparents, and a need to teach offspring about their culture.

Additionally, one may also notice that the genealogical triggers for millennials are especially different compared to the findings of previous trigger studies. In Dr. Kevin Meethan's study⁹³, the top triggers he found had to do with death of a family member or inheritance of family objects. One has to keep in mind that Meethan's study interviewed genealogists that were much older. Perhaps the triggers Meethan found reflected upon the older ages of his respondents. For example, experiencing death usually happens to people of older ages and not usually with people of younger age. It is also interesting that although "death of a family member" was certainly a trigger featured in this survey, the trigger only ranked 8th among the answers in the survey. The researcher makes the following assumption: Due to the young age of survey participants, the trigger of "death" may not have been as high as the results found in Meethan's study because of the low occurrence of it having not happened yet in most of the lives of millennials. It is a possibility that as millennials continue to grow older, the genealogical trigger of the generation may change over time,

COMMON THEMES FOUND IN MOTIVATIONS AMONG MILLENNIALS

In question 10, people were encouraged to further elaborate on one of the motivations they identified in question 9. After carefully analyzing the open-ended comments of question 10, the researcher identified a pattern of seven major themes.

⁹³ Smolenyak, "Who is the Genealogist Next Door?", 18

Motivation Themes

- 1) Knowledge
- 2) Inspiration by family members
- 3) Identity
- 4) Religion
- 5) History
- 6) Generativity
- 7) Out of obligation/ force.

The motivational theme of “driven knowledge” which means that knowledge drove the person, appears to play a big role in motivation for millennials. In answering question 10, Respondent 8, a 24 year-old male commented that in regards to motives, he had a lot of questions regarding his family’s past:

My mom says her family history traces back all the way to the pharaohs, so I think it would be cool to actually trace that history. Also, I have seven unofficial middle names which are the name of father, grandfather, great-grandfather, etc. And I've asked my dad about the meaning from my last name so I know that meaning, but I'd love to learn more.

Millennials are indeed curious. They want to know more about their past, their ancestors or a piece of history that is currently missing. Other people expressed that they were concerned about the future such as preserving family stories for posterity while others were concerned about passing on family history to their children. Respondent 232 a 26 year-old female student expressed how important it was for her to pass on family knowledge to her future children:

I'm an only child, so having a large family has always been important to me. I want to be able to tell my own children as much as possible about their roots. The only way I can do that is if I listen to my current relatives' stories and record them in some way or commit them to memory.

The researcher received several religion-inspired answers from a number of Mormon people motivated to make their ancestors proud and seeing them again in the afterlife such as Respondent 67, a 27 year-old female who said:

Religion is my number one motivation. I believe that all my ancestors need temple work done for them to receive eternal salvation.

There were some who said that they just did it because of the love for the fact-finding, the research and the history involved like Respondent 258, a 36 year-old female:

It is like solving a mystery. Finding the next clue is always around the next corner. Every clue I discover is a step closer to understanding my family and myself.

Findings within this survey appears to correlate very nicely with past surveys that were also done on motivations such as Dr. Kevin Meethan's 2001 study on 1,000 family historians, which revealed that the motivations of individual curiosity, people's personal need to connect to the past, and conducting research for future generations were top motivations for why people did genealogy.⁹⁴ The results of this researcher's survey closely matches Meethan's survey in that curiosity was the top motivation in both. One must note, however, that Meethan's survey studied people of all ages. I will make the assumption that these seven motivational themes (knowledge, inspiration by family members, identity, religion, history, passing on knowledge to the next generation (a.k.a. generativity), and out of obligation and force) are similar to findings of previous surveys.

TIME AND CULTURE MAY PLAY ROLE

Earlier in this study, a look into genealogical motivations through time was explained with the inclusion of events such as the American Revolutionary War, the influence of the Industrial Revolution and the influence of "Rootsmania" in 1976. Is it possible that millennials are currently living in a cultural time that is also influencing interest in genealogy? Yes and here is why. Millennials are currently living in a

⁹⁴ Ibid, 20.

technology boom, where laptop computers, smartphones, tablets, and other mobile electronic devices are widely being used. It is possible that technology may be helping millennials become more interested and engaged with genealogy. In question 12, people were asked specifically to explain in detail the activities that they did or currently do. It is apparent from the total 99 open-ended responses received that the factor of technology has leaked into the lives of millennials and as a result, has become a major influence in millennial involvement. Respondent 183, a 29 year-old female student for example explained how she is currently used technology to document her family's history:

Mainly, I take pictures. Social media has become a great tool for documenting family events and reliving fun events from the past. And connecting to new, extended family!

Respondent 168, a 34 year-old male expressed how he also uses his cell phone to document family social events:

The advent of cameras in cell phones and social media makes this [documenting family activities] soooooooo [sic] much easier and convenient to document and share than past technology. I take pictures every couple of days and share widely with family and close friends....

Online databases such as Ancestry.com and Cyndi's List have made it easier for millennials to get involved as indicated by both Respondent 307, a 24 year-old female who talks about using sites to double check history in her family and Respondent 73, a 30 year-old female who heavily uses family genealogy websites to conduct her research:

My grandmother gave me all of her family and my grandfather's family history and photos that she had collected after my grandfather died. They had hit a number of dead ends and so I have used various ancestry services, censuses, and other online tools to try and get past those dead ends.

I research my family genealogy online, am the liaison to the local genealogical society on behalf of the library I work at, I do publicity/ digital work for that group, attend genealogy programs, visit genealogy libraries, watch webinars, and run a very low activity Facebook group.

This is not to say that every single millennial is necessarily using technology in their research. The researcher simply infers that the current technology is making its an impact in the genealogy community and is presenting itself as a tool for family research and that millennials, along with other age groups, are indeed using it.

MILLENNIALS AND FAMILY

This survey has shown that family, at least among millennials at UNC, is highly valued. In question 19, people were asked if they believed that family was a strong personal value. Based on the results of 284 responses in total, 263 responses (making up 93% of votes) said that family was indeed a personal value. Based on results, the researcher believes that it is safe to say that millennials, at least UNC millennials, are a family-oriented group where for most, family is a large priority. For those people who answered no, I wish to know what prompted them to say so. Results that I found within the study matches up with Thom and Jess Rainer's 2011 study on 1,200 American millennials where millennials were asked about what was really important in their lives. In response 61% said that "family" was their top value.⁹⁵ In addition, Neosho Ponder's 2015 Master's thesis, which studied family values among African American millennials at Howard University, also supports the idea that millennials see family as a very

⁹⁵ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011, 74-75

important.⁹⁶ Overall, the value of family that was found in findings of the Rainer study and Ponder's study ties in well with the results of the survey in question. All the surveys indicated strongly that millennials in general do care about their family.

BARRIERS AND NON-MOTIVATIONS EXIST FOR MILLENNIALS

Based on results of this survey, many types of barriers and non-motivations were identified as reasons why millennials find it difficult to pursue genealogy or see it as unattractive to in the first place. Both questions 13 and 15 were seen as the question that would help uncover such barriers and non-motivations. In question 13, people active in genealogy were asked if they had been discouraged by someone or something while trying to research their family. Question 15, on the other hand, asked non-participating people why they did not like or want to pursue genealogy at all. One major issue that was frequently mentioned was that of age discrimination. Some people felt that older people made them feel uncomfortable at family-oriented events simply because they were young. In the case of Respondent 73, a 30 year-old female, the woman felt that she was unfortunately discriminated against more than once at genealogy presentations because of her young age:

More than once, before the program even starts, I'll be sitting quietly in the audience (front row for tech assistance), and the female presenter will walk up and start verbally attacking me. The comments are on the range of "What are you even doing here?" and "You probably know nothing." ... In the past two years, it's happened from 3 presenters. When I attend in-person workshops/programs, I'm usually the youngest person by 30 years and am verbally dismissed by the rest of the group.

Respondent 140, a 34 year-old male student told me that he also experienced dismissal:

⁹⁶ Neosho C. Ponder, "We are Family: Use of Facebook by Howard University People to Maintain Communalism," Order No. 3742214, Howard University, 2015.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1755669555?accountid=14244>.

Being young, I've been dismissed by older people as not understanding or caring about their lives, when I'm actually trying to learn more.

In analyzing these comments, the researcher infers that there still is a strong stereotype of genealogy that seems to favor older participants over younger ones. American society is limiting millennials to express interest. Instead of dismissing them, shouldn't millennials feel encouraged to know more about their families? On the other hand, it appears that older adults feel that the concept of genealogy belongs to them as if it is their job. There is no rule saying that people of a certain age are destined to do genealogy research. Millennials are a generation of smart and curious people. The stigma still exists and for some millennials, it is hindering and discouraging. As Australian genealogist Alona Tester said in her blog, the stereotype of a genealogist needs to stop.

In question 15, lack of time was seen as the number one reason as to why people did not pursue genealogy. Many mentioned to the researcher that they were busy with school and work such as Respondent 149, a 31 year-old male who said:

I did a lot of genealogical research about 7 years ago, but am now involved more with my studies/career focus and have less time to devote to genealogical research.

Considering the college population the researcher chose for the study, it is not surprising that time came up as a major problem for non-pursuit of genealogy. As a college student herself, the researcher understands and the time constraints that being in college can be like.

Lack of interest was another common reason. The researcher found that many people did not pursue genealogy if it didn't affect them in a major way. Additionally, people did not want to waste energy doing it if their hearts were not completely into it.

Of course, these three reasons were not the only issues mentioned by people, but they were the issues that the researcher felt were the most common barriers and non-motives.

I conclude that millennials who show an interest in genealogy have faced pushback or resistance at some point in their lives. Even though most millennials have not faced any resistance, there is still a small percentage of those people who encountered some kind of problem.

CONCLUSION

The popularity of genealogy continues to grow in America. However, very few studies have acknowledged millennials as active, contributing members of the genealogy community. This study aimed to find out what was known about millennials regarding their interest in genealogy as far as motivations, triggers, and the factors that influence their thinking. To find answers, the researcher designed and sent out an online survey to people between the age of 20 and 37 at the University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill.

In summary, results revealed that millennials at UNC are active in the genealogy community. They have participated in various projects ranging from simply talking to family members to more elaborate projects such as designing family websites. Millennial curiosity in their family's history is very high and millennials have an overall desire to learn more about their family history. Curiosity reigns supreme when it comes to the triggers and motivations that get millennials interested in genealogy. Millennials are intelligent and for the most, their love for knowledge manifests in a passion to know about their family. The survey has also revealed that although most young adults do not encounter barriers in researching their genealogy, a small percentage of millennials still do, encountering major problems such as age discrimination, lack of time, and lack of interest which are top reasons for why some millennials are disengaged. The researcher believes that for millennials, the current age of technology will continue to positively impact their interest in genealogy.

The researcher is aware that the findings that were found in this survey about the UNC millennials cannot be used to apply to all millennials across the United States. The researcher admits that the study was very small and only covered a minute portion of millennials in the United States. However, this study on millennials in the genealogy community is only the beginning. This survey cannot be generalized for all millennials for sure, but it shows that there is budding hope that millennials are interested in genealogy and that there is a chance that millennial interest could and probably will grow as time continues.

The researcher hopes that this study will inspire additional studies on millennial involvement with genealogy. A suggested future study could involve a genealogical survey of millennials in individual cities, states or perhaps across the United States. Do particular millennials in American towns, cities or states value genealogy more than others? Do cultures within these places influence millennials to pursue genealogy more than others? Another intriguing future study could investigate if there is a difference of genealogical interest in millennials in universities versus millennials who are not. If there is a difference in interest levels, what are the factors that cause it?

Hopefully, other institutions such as genealogical societies, historical societies, and museums may use this study as a step towards understanding the millennial generation and as a result, better serve them. With the motivations, triggers, and disincentives learned in this survey, institutions could use the information to design genealogy programs within their institution to cater to millennial needs. Since time seemed to be a major issue for millennials in this study, institutions could take that knowledge and perhaps design phone apps designed for the millennial on the go. For

people who feel put off by stereotypes, institutions need to make an effort to help millennials feel included in genealogy institutions rather than excluding them.

As America's largest age group, millennials can no longer be ignored within the genealogical community. Now that more knowledge is known about this generation in regards to genealogy, let us continue to know more about this young generation and help them to foster their desire to research family histories.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ancestry.com. Last modified 2016, www.ancestry.com

Andrews, Peter. "Genealogy- The Search for a Personal Past." *American Heritage* 33, no. 5 (1982): 10-17.

Smith Barusch, Amanda and Peter Steen. "Keepers of community in a changing world." *Generations- San Francisco-American Society on Aging* 20 (1996): 49-52.

Bidlack, Russell E. "Genealogy today." *Library Trends* 32, no. 1 (1983): 7- 23.

Bulloch, Joseph G. B. "The Problems That Now Confront Us." *NGS Quarterly* 1 (October 1912): 39-41.

Collins, Heather. "The Historical and Genealogical Society of Tomorrow." *Young & Savvy Genealogists* (blog). September 1, 2015.
<http://youngandsavvygenealogists.blogspot.com/2015/09/the-historical-and-genealogical-society.html>

Conniff, Richard. "The Family Tree, Pruned- It's Lure is Powerful-but Genealogy is Meaningless Relatively." *Smithsonian Magazine* 38 (July 2007): 90-97.

"Could Gaming Get Millennials Interested in Genealogy?" *Family Tree.com* (blog). March 6, 2014. <http://www.familytree.com/blog/could-gaming-get-millennials-interested-in-genealogy/>

Cyndi's List. Last modified 2016, www.cyndislist

Dizik, Alina. "Not Your Grandmother's Genealogy Hobby; With Wikis and Other Forms of Group Research, Family Historians Are Making Surprising Connections." *The Wall Street Journal* (December 1, 2011)
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052970204012004577070160995868288>.

Doerflinger, Elyse. "Elysesgenealogyblog.com." accessed September 18, 2015,
<http://elysesgenealogyblog.com/>

Doerflinger, Elyse. "Elyse90505." <https://www.youtube.com/user/Elyse90505/videos>

- Faw, Larrisa. "Millennials Seek Out Criminal Branches on Their Family Tree." *Forbes* (blog). October 4, 2013.
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/larissafaw/2013/10/04/millennials-seek-out-criminal-branches-on-their-family-tree/#743ed9a9e10b>
- Fulton, Crystal. "Quid pro quo: Information sharing in leisure activities." *Library Trends* 57, no. 4 (2009): 753-768.
- Genealogy Roadshow*, TV program. PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/genealogy-roadshow/home/>
- Greenway, Kathryn. "Curious About Your Roots?: Genealogy Convention Focuses on Discovering Family History." *Montreal Gazette* (May 13, 2015).
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1680909331?accountid=14244>
- Haddad, Diane. "Closing the Generation Gap." *Family Tree Magazine* (November 2010).
<http://www.familytreemagazine.com/article/Closing-the-Generation-Gap>.
- Hadis, Martin. "From Generation to Generation: Family Stories, Computers and Genealogy." PhD. diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002.
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.475.5115&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Handlin, Oscar. *Race and Nationality in American Life*. Boston: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957.
- Hecht, Michael L., Ronald L. Jackson, and Sidney A. Ribeau. *African American Communication: Exploring Identity and Culture*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2003.
- Hutchinson, Jennie Geisler. "Internet Helps, but Genealogy Still a Worthy Challenge." *TCA Regional News* (blog). Jan 31, 2016.
<http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1761319349?accountid=14244>
- Lambert, Ronald D. "The Family Historian and Temporal Orientations Towards the Ancestral Past." *Time and Society* 5, no. 2 (1996): 115- 143.
- Lowenthal, David. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. United Kingdom, University Press, Cambridge: New York Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- MacEntee, Thomas. "Genealogy and Family History Industry- Boom or Bust?" *LinkedIn.com* (blog). March 27, 2014.
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20140327173346-31267915-genealogy-and-family-history-industry-boom-or-bust>

Maritz Marketing Research Inc. "Sixty Percent of Americans Intrigued By Their Family Roots." *Public Relations Newswire*. (Last modified May 16, 2000).
<http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/sixty-percent-of-americans-intrigued-by-their-family-roots-73184067.html>

McGee, Suzanne. "Ancestry.com Puts Down Roots." *Barons* (New York, New York), August 9, 2010.
<http://www.barrons.com/articles/SB50001424052970203667404575413752973415626>

McKinstry, Leo. "Sorry, but Family History Really Is Bunk." *The Spectator* (blog). April 30, 2001. <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2008/04/sorry-but-family-history-really-is-bunk/>

"Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change." *Pew Research Centers Social Demographic Trends Project RSS*. February 23, 2010.
<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/02/24/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change/>

Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "Genealogy in the 'Information Age': History's New Frontier." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 91, no. 91 (2003): 260-277.

Mogelonsky, Marcia. "The rocky road to adulthood." *American Demographics* 18, no. 5 (1996): 26-35.

Pine, Leslie Gilbert. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Genealogy." modified December 14, 2015. <http://www.britannica.com/topic/genealogy>

Ponder, Neosho C. "We are Family: Use of Facebook by Howard University People to Maintain Communalism." Order No. 3742214, Howard University, 2015.
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1755669555?accountid=14244>.

Rainer, Thom S., and Jess W. Rainer. *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011.

Reiser, Matthew L. "Exploring Genealogical Roots and Family History and Their Influence on College Student Development: A Qualitative Study." (2012). *All Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 3356. <http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/3356/>

Rosenbluth, Vera. *Keeping Family Stories Alive: Discovering and Recording the Stories and Reflections of a Lifetime*. Point Roberts, Washington: Hartley & Marks Publishers, 1997.

Sell, Amy. "Youth in Genealogy: Generation Y Redefines Family History Research." *Findmypast.com* (blog). January 25, 2013. <https://blog.findmypast.com/youth-in-genealogy-generation-y-redefines-family-history-research-1406049013.html>

Smolenyak, Megan. "Who is the Genealogist Next Door?" *Ancestry Magazine* 21, no.5 (September/ October 2003): 15-20.

Taylor, D. Joshua. "Gen Y: The Top Lessons Learned From Genealogy." *The Huffington Post* (blog). May 20, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/d-joshua-taylor/the-top-lessons-learned-from-genealogy_b_3293806.html

Tedeschi, Bob. "Genealogists Lucrative Online Niche." *The New York Times* (New York, New York), September 23, 2002.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/23/technology/23ECOM.html?pagewanted=all>

Tester, Alona. "Don't Stereotype a Genealogist." *Genealogy and History News* (blog). August 22, 2013. <http://www.gouldgenealogy.com/2013/08/dont-stereotype-a-genealogist/>

Who Do You Think You Are? TV program. TLC, www.tlc.com/tv-shows/who-do-you-think-you-are/about-the-show/about-the-show/

Turner, Laurie Snow. "Genealogy Goes Prime Time and it's Not Just for the Retired Anymore." *Deseretnews.com* (blog). August 15, 2011
<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705389133/Genealogy-goes-prime-time-and-its-not-just-for-the-retired-anymore.html?pg=all>

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Hello and thank you for participating in this survey. You will be a big help in the research regarding millennial interest towards genealogy. Your opinion and honest feedback is greatly appreciated. If at any time you feel uncomfortable taking this survey, you are welcome to stop at any time. Your answers will remain anonymous and information you provide won't be shared with a third party. The survey will take approximately **5 to 10 minutes**. Please click the >> button below to begin.

1. What is your age?

- 19 or younger
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25
- 26
- 27
- 28
- 29
- 30
- 31
- 32
- 33
- 34
- 35
- 36
- 37
- 38 or older

2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

3. Which of the following activities **have you done or are currently doing** to get to know your family's history? Check all that apply.

- Research family history on-line or at library
- Construct a family tree
- Ask family members questions about their past
- Write/ blog about your family's history (i.e. short stories, poems, etc.)
- Create a family-related website
- Join a genealogy organization
- Attend genealogy workshops
- Collect family artifacts (i.e. photos, documents, etc.)
- Document everyday family events (via photography, video recording, etc.)
- Attend family reunions
- Create artwork
- Travel to ancestral hometowns or countries
- Other _____
- None of the above

4. Are these activities you enjoy(ed)?

- Yes and I still do
- Yes, in the past, but not anymore.
- No

5. Do you have any interest in participating in activities such as those listed in the previous question? Use the back button if needed.

- Yes
- No

6. What are your reasons for current lack of participation?

- Attend school
- Work
- Raising a family
- Travel
- Other _____

7. What first triggered your interest in genealogy?

- School project
- Church project
- Death of family member
- TV show
- Movie
- Book
- Inspiration by family member or friend
- Meeting a relative for the first time
- Visiting a genealogy website
- Family reunion
- Personal curiosity
- Hearing a family story
- Trip to ancestral hometown or country
- A family item/ heirloom
- Can't remember
- Other _____

8. **(Optional)** Tell me more! What was so **extraordinary** about this trigger that **sparked** your genealogical interest?

9. What **motivates** you to conduct genealogy or want to engage in it? Check all that apply.

- Curiosity in my family's past
- Need for self-fulfillment/ self-identity
- I like history
- Conducting research; fact-hunting; solving puzzles
- Religion
- Inspiration by family members (alive or dead)
- Obligation to research for present/ future generations
- Media (i.e. TV, movies, Internet)
- Job
- I want to see if I am related to someone famous
- I like meeting people with similar interests as me
- Provides source for healing/ therapy
- Not sure
- Other _____

10. **(Optional)** I'd like to know more, please! Is there anything **special** about **one** motive that **drives** you?

11. With your best estimate, **how long** have you participated in genealogy/ family history?

- No participation
- Less than a year
- About 1 to 4 years
- About 5 to 9 years
- About 10 or more years
- All my life
- Not sure

12. (**Optional**) Earlier in the survey, you were asked about what kind of family activities you were or are involved with to better understand your family's history. Can you **tell me a little more** about what you do in **one** of those activities you chose? For example, elaborate on **the people** you do this project with, **how often** do you do the activity or even **the products** you create in the process, etc. Use the back button to review answers in question 2 if needed.

13. Has someone or something ever left you feeling discouraged from researching your family because of your youth? If yes, please explain.

- Yes
- No

14. Why didn't you like engaging in the activities? Check all that apply.

- Lack of time
- Lack of patience
- Lack of interest
- Lack of money
- Too much hard work involved
- Genealogy is for older people
- Personal fear
- It was pointless. Genealogy is bogus
- It was pointless. We come from the same ancestor anyway
- Other _____
- Not sure

15. Why aren't you interested in participating in any of these activities? Check all that apply?

- Lack of time
- Lack of patience
- Lack of interest
- Lack of money
- Too much hard work involved
- Genealogy is for older people
- I'm skeptical of family information found on-line. It's unreliable
- It does not matter. We come from the same ancestor anyway
- Genealogy is bogus. Why bother?
- Personal fear
- My family is not worth researching
- Other _____

16. **(Optional)** Please pick **one** answer from the previous question and elaborate.

17. **(Optional)** Is there anything that would change your mind about genealogy?

18. Please rate your current overall interest towards genealogy with **1 being the least** and **10 being the most**.

[10 increment scale displayed here]

19. Do you believe that family is a strong personal value?

- Yes
- No

20. **(Optional)** Almost done! Is there anything else you would like me to know about you that I haven't addressed?

21. You're all done! Thank you for taking the survey. Have a great day!

22. [Alternate survey ending] Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This study focused on surveying millennials born between 1978 and 1995. Based on the age you provided, you are waived from answering any further questions. Have a wonderful day!

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS WORKFLOW CHART

